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A plural indefinite quantifier on the Romance-Slavic border

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Abstract

This study investigates the plural form *uni/une* deriving from the numeral ‘one’ in the Istriot dialect of Sissano. Sissano is located in the Istrian peninsula, an area characterized by high intensity of linguistic contact. We argue that the rise of such a peculiar form is indeed induced by contact with Croatian and that *uni/une* is unique in the Italo-Romance domain since, generally, the plural indefinite forms derived from the Latin numeral ‘one’ are pronouns and never occur in attributive position. The use of *uni/une* is not attested in the few grammars of Istriot varieties because it is recent and still undergoing a process of grammaticalization. Therefore, we conducted interviews to verify how and to what extent contact with Croatian affects the meaning and the use of *uni/une* in Sissano. We found that this form is mostly used as a quantifier, bearing mainly the meaning ‘a pair of’, ‘one group of’, in the context of *pluralia tantum* and plural dominant nouns. We further observe that this quantifier has achieved a more advanced stage of grammaticalization in the younger generation of speakers than in the older ones. We discuss the role played by *pluralia tantum* as well as by the growing prestige of Croatian in triggering this borrowing and in fostering the grammaticalization process of *uni/une* on its way to become a marker of indefiniteness.

Keywords: Istriot; Sissano; Croatian; borrowing; numeral one; *pluralia tantum*; plural dominance

1. Introduction

1.1 Historical and linguistic landscape of Istria

This case study seeks to investigate the use of the plural forms of the numeral ‘one’ in the Istriot dialect of Sissano [Croatian: Šišan], nowadays located in Croatia. First of all, a short description of the area is necessary since its historical and linguistic situation is particularly complex. The Istrian peninsula was Romanized in the 2nd century BC, a fact that eventually led to the development of Istriot, a Romance language which encompasses five more varieties spoken in some neighboring cities and villages: Rovigno [Rovinj], Valle [Bale], Dignano [Vodnjan], Fasana [Fažana] and Gallezano [Galižana] (Figure 1).¹ In the past, Istriot was probably spoken throughout the Southern part of the Istrian peninsula, with some enclaves in the Northern part. Today, its distribution in the territory is patchy. Filipi (2002: 87) refers to it as a *Sprachinsel* (or *language island*), but we prefer to use the term *arcipelago linguistico* ‘language archipelago’ (cf. Giudici 2018).

¹ The use of the glottonym to denote this group of varieties has been controversial, sometimes hiding the political goal of associating them with the northern Italo-Romance varieties or of isolating them as an autonomous Romance branch. Ascoli (1873: 434) was the first to use the term *Istriot*; Ive (1900) classified it as a Ladin-Venetan variety; Merlo (1937: 18) introduced the option *Istrian* (lately adopted by other scholars, see Maiden 2018); Skok (1943) was the first to name it *Istro-Romance*, followed by Deanović (1954) and Tekavčić (1961); while Jahn (2001: 169) opted for *Istriotic*. All these glottonyms can visibly lead to misunderstanding since other Romance varieties are present in the territory. In order to avoid any confusion, in this study we use the most neutral term *Istriot* when referring to the six varieties mentioned before.



Figure 1. Linguistic map of Istria (based on Pellegrini 1977: 65): the dotted lines in gray and light gray highlight Istriot and Istro-Venetan varieties respectively, while the dotted lines in dark gray delineate the Istro-Romanian domains.

Starting from the 11th century, the peninsula was under the influence of Venice and a process of Venetianization lasted until the fall of the Republic in 1797. This quite long period led to the development of a Venetian-based koine, today known as Istro-Venetan. The Slavic languages present in the territory are the Čakavian dialects, which have been strongly influenced by Venetian throughout the centuries, and Croatian, the official language of the Republic of Croatia. The Slavs settled in Istria for the first time in the 6th century and ever since, a Romance-Slavic co-presence has been attested. The last language to be mentioned in this list is Istro-Romanian, a Daco-Romance language comprising two main varieties spoken near the Monte Maggiore [Učka] massif in the north-eastern part of Istria.

Istria suffered many administrative changes, becoming part of the Kingdom of Italy after World War I, then part of the Yugoslav federation after World War II and eventually, since 1991, the Republic of Croatia. When the region passed under Yugoslav administration, it underwent a major demographic change since a considerable part of the italophone population migrated (mainly to Italy). Today, the Istriot language is included in Unesco's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. Estimating the number of speakers of an endangered language is a delicate question: it varies from 15,000 assumed by Kramer (1987: 91) to approximately 1,000 proposed almost thirty years later by Cergna (2014: 371n). However, the entire Istriot speaking community is still underestimated and has not been corroborated by sociolinguistic inquiries that could describe in depth its interaction with the varieties present in the area. Another major problem concerns the fact that this minority is still not recognized in the current Croatian constitution (Vuletić 2014: 185). Unfortunately, the only efforts made by the authorities were mainly intended to preserve the Italian language, but Italian never gained a foothold outside the school and administrative spheres even during the Fascist period (Blagoni 2012: 451).

1.1.2. Sissano

As mentioned before, Sissanese is the Istriot variety of Sissano, located near the main Istrian city of Pola [Pula]. Luckily, we have a recent sociolinguistic survey describing the linguistic situation of the village (Giudici 2018) that will be very useful for illuminating the results of this article. The research, involving 10% of the inhabitants (mainly Istriot speakers), revealed that the linguistic repertoire of Sissano is very rich, including Croatian, Italian, Sissanese, Istro-Venetan and Čakavian (followed by other standard languages such as English, German, etc.) among the most used varieties in everyday life. On the one hand, the study reported that the speakers of Sissanese are at least four times the number estimated in the previous literature (Cergna 2014: 317n). However, it also revealed that intergenerational language transmission was basically interrupted during the '50s (after the Second World War, when the region was annexed to Yugoslavia). The answers offered by the younger generations to the questions “In what language did/do your grandparents talk to each other?” / “In what language did/do your parents talk to each other?” show that Istro-Venetan, Čakavian and Croatian have gradually replaced Istriot in the domestic environment. A clear picture is provided in the chart below, adapted from Giudici (2018: 105), regarding the language people speak with their partner (Figure 2).

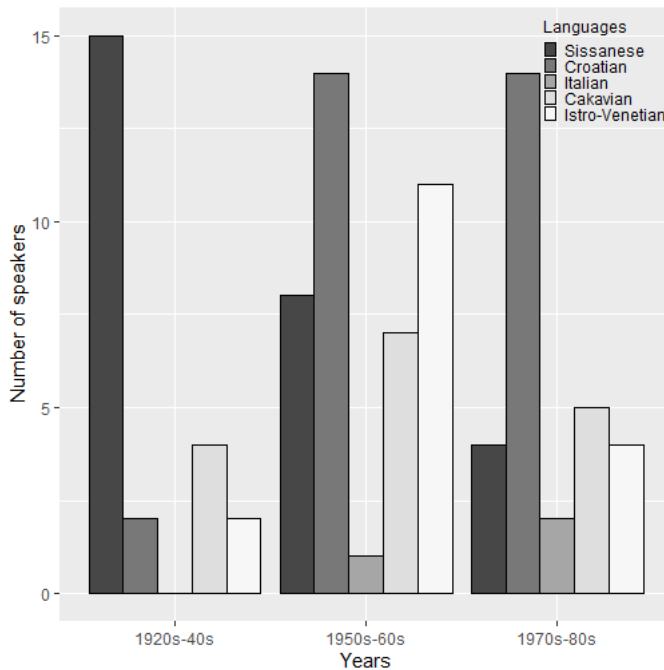


Figure 2. Language spoken with one's partner across generations in Sissano.

The data offered by the consultants show that generations born between 1920 and 1940 use mostly Sissanese for their interaction, whereas in the following decades the importance of Croatian increases exponentially; this is more evident for those born in the '70s–'80s when all dialects (including Čakavian) suffer a severe contraction. These results corroborate the recent prevalence of Croatian even among families that spoke Sissanese as a first language only a century ago. The progressive language shift in the domestic environment illustrates the assimilation of this archaic dialect by the other varieties present in the linguistic repertoire which enjoy a higher linguistic prestige among the community (Croatian, Čakavian, Istro-Venetan). Sissanese is still spoken nowadays, but only in the family and in interactions between the members of the village.

1.2. The numeral *one*

The high number of typologically unrelated languages that independently developed the numeral *one* as an indefinite marker drew the attention of Givón (1981), who described its diachronic steps exploiting examples from Hebrew. Indeed, despite the fact that indefinite reference can be expressed by means of other mechanisms such as word order or markers etymologically unrelated to numerals, the use of the numeral *one* is attested worldwide from Mandarin to Amerindian languages, enough to be considered a good candidate for a linguistic universal. In the sizeable WALS corpus (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013, accessed online in 2020), among all the possible strategies to express indefiniteness in noun phrases in the languages of the world (i.e. an indefinite word distinct from the numeral for 'one', an indefinite affix on noun, and no marker), the numeral 'one' chalks up an impressive 112 out of 534 reported languages (198 of these have neither an indefinite article nor a definite article; cf. Map 38A by Dryer 2013).

As Givón (1981: 52) pointed out clearly, the numeral *one* is the natural item to introduce a new referential argument into discourse and at the same time identify it by its generic properties. It implies existence/referentiality, but also the meaning 'one out of the type/many/group', thereby fulfilling the two requirements to introduce a referential-indefinite argument. Givón's grammaticalization theory of the numeral *one* is exemplified in (1), while Heine (1997: 72–73) proposed a more articulated model consisting of five stages (2).

- (1) quantification → referentiality/denotation → genericity/connotation
- (2) numeral → presentative marker → specific marker → non-specific marker → generalized article

If the form 'one' in the singular is the first stage, the existence of a plural counterpart testifies to its use as an indefinite article because in this case the reference to cardinality equal to one is self-evidently absent. This is what we find in Lavukaleve, a Solomon East Papuan language, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) *kanege* *rovo*
 family INDEF.PL
 'some families' Dryer (2013) (cited from Terrill 2003: 80)

The aim of this study is to describe the use of the plural form of the quantifier 'one' in Sissanese. Before stating the methods and the results, we will provide an overview of the use of numerals in both Romance and Slavic languages, since Istriot has been for centuries on the border between these two language families.

1.2.1. The numeral *one* in Romance and Slavic languages

As is well known, the Romance languages developed an indefinite article from the Latin numeral UNUM/UNAM, but its particularity lies in the fact that, although the Latin numeral inflected for number (as well as for gender and case), only a minority of Western Romance varieties inherited a plural form derived from UNOS/UNAS. Today, the plural forms are generally considered indefinite quantifiers rather than plural articles since their use is mostly optional (cf. Ledgeway 2011: 409). Examples can be found in Ibero-Romance (Catalan *uns/unes*, Spanish *unos/unas*, and Portuguese *uns/umas*), modern Occitan (*ùni*),² and Old French (*uns/unes*). As far as Old French is concerned, the literature observed repeatedly that its use is prevalent with *pluralia tantum* or nouns considered collectively (Price 1992: 448). Although it is indisputable that the *pluralia tantum* could trigger this use (Buridant 2000: §81), a search of the Old French corpus *BFM* shows 72 occurrences of the feminine plural form *unes* but only six with *pluralia tantum* (8.3%). The other 66 tokens correspond to pronouns (4a), in a syntagm later crystallized in Modern French, or are used as indefinite quantifiers (4b):

² Old Occitan also displays a feminine plural form *unas*, see *DOM*, s.v. *un* (Stimm & Stempel 1996).

- (4) a. *letres* *escrites* *les* *unes* *d'or* *et* *les* *autres* *d'argent*
 letter(F).PL write.PART.F.PL the.F.PL one.F.PL of gold and the.F.PL others of silver
 'some letters written in gold and the others in silver'
- b. *unes* *richoises* *qu'* *il* *desideroit*
 one.F.PL riches(F).PL that 3SG(M) desire-IMPF.3SG
 '(some) riches that he desired'
- (CommPsia1a: 137)

This strategy for expressing indefiniteness is absent in Standard Italian, where the plural form of 'one' is used only as a pronoun. Following Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018), Italo-Romance varieties present five different strategies in addition to indefinite quantifiers such as *alcuni* 'some' or pseudo-partitive constructions such as *un po' di* 'a bit of': (i) indefinite singular *un(o)* / *una*; (ii) the definite article; (iii) bare *di* 'of'; (iv) *di* 'of'+article; (v) *certo/a*, *certi/e* 'certain'. From their analyses based on linguistic maps of the AIS (637 "to go and look for violets", 1037 "if there was water", and 1343 "to go to the cellar to take wine"), the Italian peninsula can be subdivided by two crossing axes: "The North-South axis is defined by the distribution of the zero determiner at its extremes versus the definite article in its core part. The Northwest-Northeast axis is defined by the presence of *di* either by itself or combined with the definite article in the area where the two axes intersect" (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 149). In Northern Italo-Romance³ the zero determiner seems to be the preferred option (in the context *di*+article), but – as expected – none of the points on the map 637 show a feminine plural instance of the indefinite article *una*: **Ho raccolto une violette* 'I picked some (lit: one.F.PL) violets' (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 149).

The picture is even more complex for Slavic languages given that, traditionally, they have been argued not to show articles as a separate grammatical category and hence are considered languages without determiners (cf., among others, Chierchia 1998; Dayal 2004; Bošković 2005). However, recent studies have claimed that this statement is only partially correct because in some Slavic varieties the numeral 'one' is undergoing a process of grammaticalization towards the function of the indefinite article. In the last thirty years, many scholars have provided new insights on so-called "articleless" languages. The pioneer in this area is Weiss (1996), who described the rise of the numeral *eden* as an indefinite marker in Macedonian, showing that such a numeral became also interchangeable with the indefinite determiner *nekoj* 'some/certain' within a period of only twenty years (Weiss 2004: 156). The same could be said for Bulgarian *edin* described in Geist (2013), who was inspired by Weiss (2004). In addition, Friedman (1976; 2000a; 2003a; 2003b) put forward the hypothesis that the indefinite article in Bulgarian may be linked with the Balkan *Sprachbund*, considering Albanian and Turkish as the source languages, but this is still disputed in the literature. Recently, Runić (2019) showed fully grammaticalized indefinite articles to be present in two endangered Slavic varieties within Italian borders: Resian (related to Slovenian) and Molise Croatian (related to Croatian).⁴ The first variety, more interesting for our purposes, developed an indefinite article from the numeral 'one' which can also be inflected in the plural (as shown in (5)), while the latter displays only a singular form (as plural nouns can be bare or preceded by the indefinite determiner *neki* 'some'; cf. Runić 2019: 305; Breu 2005).

- (5) *Wsën* *našën* *judin* *awgurawamö* *ne* *lipe* *fjěšte.*
 all.DAT our.DAT people.DAT wish.2PL.PRS one.PL nice Holidays
 'We wish happy holidays to all our people!'
- (Runić 2019: 297)

The grammaticalization process of the numeral *one* evolving into an indefinite article presupposes semantic bleaching of quantification, and this pattern is still visible in European languages where the starting and the arriving points present the same phonological form (Belaj & Matovac 2015: 3), for example in French *un*

³ From a typological point of view, Venetan is the closest dialect to Sissanese.

⁴ Resian shows the unstressed variant of the numeral 'one' lacking the initial *d-* in the paradigm, except for the M.SG.NOM/ACC form *din* (Runić 2019: 302). In the article, the author argues that Resian and Molise Croatian followed separate paths of grammaticalization, since Resian also developed a definite article, while this latter is absent in Molise Croatian.

homme ‘one man’ vs. *un homme* ‘a man’.⁵ As suggested before, this is considered a linguistic universal; however, Comrie & Corbett (1993) adopted a different approach for the Slavic languages given that in Proto-Slavic the numerals ‘one’ and ‘two’ were of pronominal origin and followed the pronominal inflection. In turn, this would also explain the fact that sometimes the numeral ‘one’ means ‘some, certain’ in almost all Slavic languages. Nonetheless, the list of publications that mention the use of the numeral ‘one’ as an indefinite marker in the Slavic languages is quite long and includes, among others, Czech (Siewierska & Uhlířová 1998), Upper Sorbian (Breu 2011), Slovenian (Reindl 2008), Serbian (Friedman 2000b), and Burgenland Croatian (Reindl 2008).⁶ Considering the continuum stages illustrated in (2), from the numeral up to the generalized article, Ibero-Romance languages can be placed in the final step since their indefinite article agrees with plural nouns. They are followed by English and German at the penultimate stage, while usually Slavic languages reach only the specific marker stage (Heine & Kuteva 2006). However, the aforementioned recent works have revealed that Resian, Upper Sorbian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian have moved beyond the third stage and reached the non-specific marker status. What is striking is that the closer a Slavic variety is to languages with an indefinite article (i.e. Romance, Germanic, Greek, Albanian, and Turkish) the more the advanced is the stage of grammaticalization reached by the numeral ‘one’ (Belaj & Matovac 2015: 4–5). While this observation requires further research and a complete review of the languages needs to be taken into account (considering primarily the development in diachrony), it is fascinating and finds confirmation in the more advanced stage of grammaticalization of the indefinite marker ‘one’ in the West and South Slavic branches, which are indeed in contact with languages having indefinite articles, than in the East Slavic branch (Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian). Over the past two decades, Croatian has also been investigated, with scholars focusing mainly on the concept of definiteness (cf. Friedman 2000b; Trenkic 2004; Katunar, Willer & Gnjatović 2013). In Croatian, definiteness can be expressed in three different ways: (i) via indefinite and definite adjective inflection; (ii) via definite and indefinite pronouns; and (iii) via the numeral *jedan* ‘one’ in the function of an indefinite article (Katunar, Gold & Gnjatovic 2013: 26). Regarding the first option, grammars point out that the definite form is realized with the *-i* suffix, while the short form of the adjective is considered to convey the indefinite form:

- (6) a. *brz* *auto*
 fast(INDEF) car
 ‘a fast car’
 b. *brz-i* *auto*
 fast-DEF car
 ‘the fast car’

(Trenkic 2004: 1404–1405)

However, the expression of definiteness via adjective inflection seems to fall into disuse along with the opposition between the two adjectival forms, as it becomes optional or stylistically marked (Trenkic 2004: 1404; Katunar, Willer & Gnjatović 2013: 27). In Croatian, the numeral ‘one’ can also be used as a numeral, as an adjective and as an “indefinite determiner with article-like use” (Belaj & Matovac 2015: 9). What is interesting for our study is the use of the numeral *jedan* ‘one’ in its last meaning (examples in (7) found in Katunar, Willer & Gnjatović 2013: 32; Belaj & Matovac 2015: 9):

⁵ See also Lyons (1999) on the articles arising from the grammaticalization of numerals in German and English.

⁶ For a more complete review of the literature see Belaj & Matovac (2015: 3n).

- (7) a. *Tu bi sad dobro došlo jedno*
 there AUX-3SG now well come-COND.3SG one-NOM.SG
majčino srce.
 mother's-NOM.SG heart-NOM.SG
 'A mother's heart would be of use right now.'
- b. *Kupio sam to od jedne*
 buy-PST-M.SG be.1SG this from one-GEN.F.SG
žene na tržnici.
 woman(F)-GEN.SG on market(F)-LOC.SG
 'I bought this from a (lit. one) woman at the market.'

The examples offered by Belaj & Matovac (2015: 17) clearly show that even Croatian “reached the specific indefinite marker stage and partially the non-specific indefinite marker stage in contexts in which *jedan* [‘one’] and *neki* [‘some, certain’] are interchangeable”. Croatian article-like *jedan* and *neki* are in free variation, except in particular contexts where *jedan* usually cannot be associated with plural referents, although it is acceptable in the spoken register (Belaj & Matovac 2015: 17). However, the Croatian numeral ‘one’ agrees in gender and number (M/F/N, SG/PL)⁷ with the target (cf. Leko 2009: 79;⁸ Corbett 2019: 78–79) as exemplified in (8).

- (8) a. *jedn-i svatov-i*
 one.NOM.M.PL wedding.procession(M)-PL-NOM.PL
 ‘one wedding procession’
- b. *jedn-e naočal-e*
 one-NOM.F.PL eyeglasses(F)-NOM.PL
 ‘one pair of (lit. one) eyeglasses’

The plural form of the numeral ‘one’ is present in Čakavian varieties of Istria too, usually denoting *pluralia tantum* or nouns which occur in pairs and, sometimes, meaning also ‘some, certain’: “*jene holjevi* Apl. [‘one pair of’] stockings’, *jeni postoli* Apl. [‘one pair of’] shoes’, *jene kr̂đsna/jena kr̂đsna* [...] ‘one weaving-loom’” (Kalsbeek 1998: 175). The fact that in these languages the plural form of the numeral ‘one’ is mostly found with *pluralia tantum* has not been addressed in depth. Corbett (2019) noted that *pluralia tantum* have no singular and thus trigger syntactic agreement in the plural even in those cases involving the numeral ‘one’. Moreover, the semantics of *pluralia tantum* have been argued to be strictly related to those of collectives and “by means of collectives units are counted each of which is a multiplicity” (Lofstedt 1958: §4, 2 quoted in Ojeda 1997: 146). Interestingly enough, in some Slavic languages *pluralia tantum* must be modified by a special set of numerals, the collective numerals (Corbett 2019: 92–93; for collective numerals in Latin cf. Ojeda 1997). In the final analysis, *pluralia tantum* appear to be particularly suitable to giving rise to the emergence of the plural form ‘one’ since this latter does surface in the plural while retaining a meaning of singularity in the sense of ‘one group of’, ‘one pair of’. Furthermore, since it has been claimed that the plural form ‘one’ is a hallmark of grammaticalization (as in the case of *unos/unas* in Spanish; cf. §1.2.1), we may wonder whether *pluralia tantum* play indeed a pivotal role also in initiating the process from quantification up to generic connotation (cf. § 1.2.) especially in light of the conspicuous prevalence of *pluralia tantum* nouns in Circum-Baltic languages (Vraciu 1976; Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wächli 2001). More research is needed here.

⁷ We do not provide an example in the neuter form since it is not useful for our argumentation.

⁸ In this article, we make a distinction between Croatian and Serbian, but it is well known that both behave in the same way and that in the literature, they are often merged with Bosnian under the label BCS (Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian).

1.3. The present study

The Istriot quantifier *uni/une* is unique in the Italo-Romance domain since, generally, the plural indefinite forms derived from the Latin numeral ‘one’ are pronouns and never occur in attributive position (Loporcaro 2018: 75). In light of this, it has to be assumed that the rise of such a peculiar form is probably induced by contact with Slavic languages and, therefore, takes the form of pattern borrowing (following the definition in Matras & Sakel 2007 and in Sakel 2007; cf. also Gardani 2020). If so, this creates a puzzling scenario in which a language traditionally described as articleless, i.e. Croatian, has grammaticalized the numeral ‘one’ probably by contact with Romance and Germanic languages (cf. § 1.2.1.; Belaj & Matovac 2015: 4–5) and, in turn, has served as a base for the rise of the plural form ‘one’ in a Romance variety, i.e. Istriot, that originally showed a complete article paradigm except for indefinite plurals. At least to our knowledge, the Istriot quantifier *uni/une* has never been investigated in the literature. We conducted the first survey to examine how and to what extent contact with Croatian affects the meaning and the use of this form in Sissano, one of the six Istriot varieties. Sissanese shows a complete paradigm for gender and number for the definite article, but lacks a complete one for the indefinite article, a situation common to many other Italo-Romance varieties (cf. Rohlfs 1968 § 422):

(9) Definite article in Sissanese			Indefinite article in Sissanese ⁹	
	SG	PL		SG
M	(a)l	i	M	(u)n
F	la	le	F	(u)na

The same paradigms were found in the Istriot variety of Rovigno with phonologically slightly different forms (cf. Deanović 1954: 32–33; Benussi 2015: 29–30). The use of the quantifier *uni/une* is not attested in the dictionaries and in grammars of Istriot varieties because it is still in the process of grammaticalization and linked to a predominantly oral use. The only written attestation from Istriot speakers, to our knowledge, comes from the war diary of Felice Cnapich (1908–1975), a soldier from Sissano who fought in the Spanish Civil War.¹⁰ In his still unpublished text (Cnapich, in preparation) we find example (10).

(10)	<i>scendemo (sic)</i>	<i>giù</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>une</i>	<i>scale</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>pietra</i>
	descend-PRF.1PL	down	from	one.F.PL	stairs	of	stone(F).SG
	<i>e li (sic)</i>	<i>ci</i>	<i>fermarono</i>				
	and there	us	stop-IMP.F.3PL				
	‘We went down the stone stairs and they stopped us there.’						

We conducted structured interviews including two combined tasks: semi-spontaneous speech and an acceptability rating. Capitalizing on previously discussed Croatian *jedan*, we aimed to verify: (i) how often the form *uni/une* is used; (ii) the extent to which its use is deemed acceptable; (iii) the sociolinguistic factors possibly constraining its use (age factor); (iv) the semantic factors possibly constraining its use (does the reference to ‘one group of/one pair of’ foster the use of *uni/une*?); and (v) the morphological factors possibly constraining its use (do nouns having a paradigm skewed towards the value of plural foster the use of *uni/une*?). In the following paragraphs, we describe the methods used in our investigation (§2) and report the results obtained (§3). The fourth section is devoted to discussing the findings; conclusions are drawn in the last paragraph.

⁹ For the plural Sissanese also displays the quantifier *neschi/-e* ‘some’ or a bare nominal.

¹⁰ Camilla Granzotto (personal communication; cf. also Granzotto 2020) found some written attestations of *une* dating back to the first half of the XV century. In this case, though, *une* was used by Slavophones in Italian vernacular notary documents with a very specific meaning and in highly specific contexts (e.g., *une chantamise* ‘some (= ten) masses’).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Seventeen informants consented to be interviewed on a voluntary basis. Two participants were excluded from the analysis because at the very beginning of the session they denied categorically the use of the form *uni/une*, which is why it did not make sense to continue the interview. The final analyses were therefore performed on a total of fifteen speakers (F=8; age: mean=63.7, range=24–88; education: mean=10.7, range=5–21). All participants were healthy, had normal or correct-to-normal vision and reported no history of hearing disorders. Informed consent was sought from each participant before taking part in the study. Regarding the linguistic profile, all informants were native speakers of the Istriot dialect of Sissano and at the time of the survey (January 2019) they spoke at least three of the top five varieties widespread in the area (Čakavian, Croatian, Istro-Venetan, and Italian in addition to the aforementioned dialect of Sissano). All participants had at minimum a passive competence in standard Italian and standard Croatian. Indeed, the great majority of them showed an active competence in both these languages as well as in Istro-Venetan and Čakavian, whereas just one participant reported not to speak Italian and three others reported not to speak Croatian. Only one person among the consultants had left Sissano and moved to the nearby city of Pola, but maintained a strong link with the village. Only a few of them had left their hometown for a long period for education or military service. As already mentioned in §1.1, Giudici (2018: 109-111) provided a sociolinguistic description pointing out that Sissanese is used for in-group communication (i.e. with the group in which one psychologically identifies as a member). As for out-group communication, Istro-Venetan is used with the other members of the Italian community, while Croatian fulfills all the other functions since it is the official language.

2.2. Materials

A large body of literature has observed that, when present, the indefinite plural form derived from the numeral ‘one’ tends to co-occur with *pluralia tantum* nouns and to denote referents considered in pairs. This holds true for Romance (cf. for Old French: Bauer 2011: 550; Buridant 2000 §81; Price 1992: 448) as well as Slavic (cf. Leko 2009: 25 for Croatian and Kalsbeek 1998: 175 for Čakavian). Nowadays, the presence of this indefinite plural form is much sparser in the first area (being attested in a lot of varieties such as Occitan dialects and Ibero-Romance languages). Intriguingly enough, it has also been noted that Circum-Baltic languages are characterized by a prevalence of *pluralia tantum* nouns (Vraciu 1976; Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wächli 2001), a fact that may contribute in spreading the use of this form. Yet, at least in Croatian, the use of corresponding *jedni/jedne* is not restricted to *pluralia tantum* nouns and to the denotation of referents considered in pairs, but is also attested to a lesser extent with plural nouns in general to indicate a paucal or indefinite numerousness (§ 1.2.1; cf. Belaj & Matovac 2015: 17 for the use of plural in the spoken register).

Given the above, in order to verify the extent to which contact with Croatian affects the use of the quantifier *uni/une* in the Istriot dialect, we selected 24 concrete, countable, and familiar plural nouns, subdivided into three groups: (i) *pluralia tantum* nouns (henceforth PLT; e.g. *ociai* ‘eyeglasses’), (ii) plural dominant nouns (henceforth PLD; e.g. *calsini* ‘socks’), and (iii) count plural nouns (henceforth PLC; e.g. *capoti* ‘coats’). These latter show no constraints regarding their morphological number paradigm, whereas the first two groups do. More precisely, we considered *plurale tantum* a noun whose paradigm is defective with respect to the singular form and therefore, regardless of its semantics, never occurs in the singular in the language at issue.¹¹ Conversely, a plural dominant noun can be inflected both in the singular and in the

¹¹ We embrace a basic definition of *pluralia tantum* for the sake of convenience in testing, but we are aware that the status of *pluralia tantum* is more blurred (Acquaviva 2008; Corbett 2019). Furthermore, as specified below, we kept semantic variability at a minimum across experimental items once again for testing reasons (first and foremost picturability). We avoided less imaginable nouns such as names of festivities, names of diseases and abstract nouns in general. As a result, almost all *pluralia tantum* used in this study refer to concrete entities having a perceptually salient internal articulation (cf. Acquaviva 2008: 20).

plural, although its plural form is more likely to occur than the corresponding singular (for the notion of dominance, cf. Baayen et al. 1996, 1997, 2007; Biedermann et al. 2013). Since the dialect of Sissano has no corpora, we were unable to picture accurately the ratio of a noun's frequency in the singular over its frequency in the plural form. To cope with this situation, as Sissano is an Italo-Romance variety,¹² we relied on measures collected from itWaC (Baroni et al. 2009), a 2-billion-word Italian corpus that has been drawn from the Web and thus resembles oral production, and a speaker of Sissano validated the nouns with respect to each group. Furthermore, the selected nouns designate only objects, clothing, or tools to keep semantic variability at a minimum across conditions. Grammatical gender also was balanced across conditions (11 feminine nouns and 13 masculine nouns in total).

In order to better inspect the meaning and the reference of the quantifier *uni/une*, two pictures were created for each noun: in one picture, the object representing the target noun was depicted in one pair (Figure 3a); in the second picture, the same pair was replicated several times (i.e. from three to four pairs; Figure 3b). Each noun was also included in three different phrases. In the first type of phrase, the target noun was modified by the definite plural article 'the' (e.g. *i ociai ciari* 'the sunglasses in soft colours'). In another phrase, the same target noun was preceded by the classifier 'pair(s) of' (e.g. *un per de ociai ciari* 'a pair of sunglasses in soft colours'). Lastly, the target noun followed the quantifier *uni/une* in a third phrase (*uni ociai ciari* 'a pair of/some sunglasses in soft colours'). As illustrated in Figure 3, each picture-to-phrase match forces a specific reading of the target referent. All experimental conditions are summarized in Table 1.



A. ONE PAIR	B. MORE PAIRS
	
<i>i ociai ciari</i> 'the sunglasses in soft colours'	<i>i ociai scuri</i> 'the sunglasses in dark colours'

Figure 3. An example of pictures used during the interview.

Table 1. Experimental conditions.

NUMBER OF DEPICTED PAIRS	TYPE OF DETERMINER	TYPE OF NOUN
One pair	definite plural article 'the'	PLT (<i>Pluralia Tantum</i>)
	classifier 'a pair of'	
	quantifier <i>uni/une</i>	
More pairs	definite plural article 'the'	PLD (Plural Dominant)
	classifier '3 (or 4) pairs of'	
	quantifier <i>uni/une</i>	
One pair	definite plural article 'the'	PLC (Count Plural)
	classifier 'a pair of'	
	quantifier <i>uni/une</i>	
More pairs	definite plural article 'the'	
	classifier '3 (or 4) pairs of'	
	quantifier <i>uni/une</i>	

¹² For the purpose of this study, we consider Sissanese as an Italo-Romance variety, but we are aware of the problem concerning the classification of Istriot varieties in the Romance family (cf. Barbato 2020 for a recapitulation of the positions assumed by scholars on Istriot).

2.3. Procedure

The interviews were carried out using the Istriot dialect in a quiet and comfortable room. Each interview started by asking the informant to introduce him/herself and to tell a brief story in order to create a natural context of interaction. Thus, the first part of the interview was devoted to collecting spontaneous speech following the gold standard procedure in dialectology. Then, the more structured part of the interview took place. At first, the informant was invited to look at each picture on a computer screen and to describe it (semi-spontaneous speech). Subsequently, he/she was asked to rate a phrase pronounced by the interviewer describing that picture on a five-point Likert scale (rating). The possible scores were: 1= totally unacceptable; 2= unacceptable; 3= neither unacceptable nor acceptable; 4= acceptable; 5= perfectly acceptable. During the interview, informants were invited to take frequent breaks to minimize their fatigue. Each interview was audio-recorded and lasted on average about one hour.

2.4. Data analysis

We analysed data collected from semi-spontaneous speech and from the rating by means of the R software (R Core Team 2020). In the first case, we gauged how many times the quantifier *uni/une* has been spontaneously elicited in the context of pictures in connection with the type of target noun and the number of the depicted pairs. As far as the rating is concerned, we calculated the proportion of answers per point of the Likert scale in relation to the type of determiner, the type of target noun and the number of depicted pairs.

Following Tagliamonte & Baayen (2012), we investigated the differences in the production and in the rating of the quantifier *uni/une* across conditions by means of conditional inference trees and random forest making use of the party package in R (Strobl et al. 2007; 2008; Hothorn et al. 2006). These non-parametric models are particularly suitable when the sample size is small while the number of predictors is high and are robust in case of outliers; moreover, “random forests allow the researcher to explore more aspects of the data and by consequence more insights into the explanation for variable processes” (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 163). We fitted a random forest model to inspect the importance of the variables that come into play in the production of *uni/une* considering this latter as the dependent variable and the type of target noun (PLT, PLD, PLC), the number of depicted pairs (one pair vs. more pairs), age, and sex as predictors. We also fitted a conditional inference trees model using the same predictors to check how these variables operate together. We adopted the same procedure in examining the results from the rating, using the rating scores as the dependent variable and as predictors the type of determiner (‘the’, ‘pair(s) of’, *uni/une*), the type of target noun (PLT, PLD, PLC), the number of depicted pairs (one pair vs. more pairs), age, and sex.

The trees method has proven to give more robust results and more accurate predictions when compared to other types of models (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012; Baayen 2008). However, participants and experimental items cannot currently be set as random effects in this model. Therefore, we counterchecked the conditional inference trees and random forest output effects making use of the glmer function from the lme4 package in R (Bates et al. 2015) and fitting a mixed-effect binomial logistic regression model in which the production of *uni/une* was the dependent variable; the number of depicted pairs, the noun type, and the age were the predictors; the subjects and the experimental items were the random effects. We also fitted a cumulative link mixed model making use of the clmm function from the ordinal package in R (Christensen 2019) to analyse the differences in the rating scores. In this model, the rating scores were the dependent variable while the type of determiner, the type of target noun, the number of depicted pairs and the age were the predictors. The subjects and the experimental items were considered random effects and random slopes for participants and items were included in the model.

3. Results

3.1. Semi-spontaneous speech

Participants spontaneously produced *uni/une* 17% of the time (123/720; Figure 4a), more reliably in the context of pictures illustrating one pair of objects (87/123, 70%) than in the context of those illustrating more pairs (36/123, 30%; Figure 4d). When the referent represented in the picture was denoted by a plural count noun the quantifier *uni/une* was never elicited; conversely, *uni/une* was produced in 45% of cases (56/123) in the context of plural dominant nouns and in 55% of cases (67/123) in the context of *pluralia tantum* nouns (Figure 4c). No age group used *uni/une* to describe the pictures more than 20% of the time (Figure 4b).

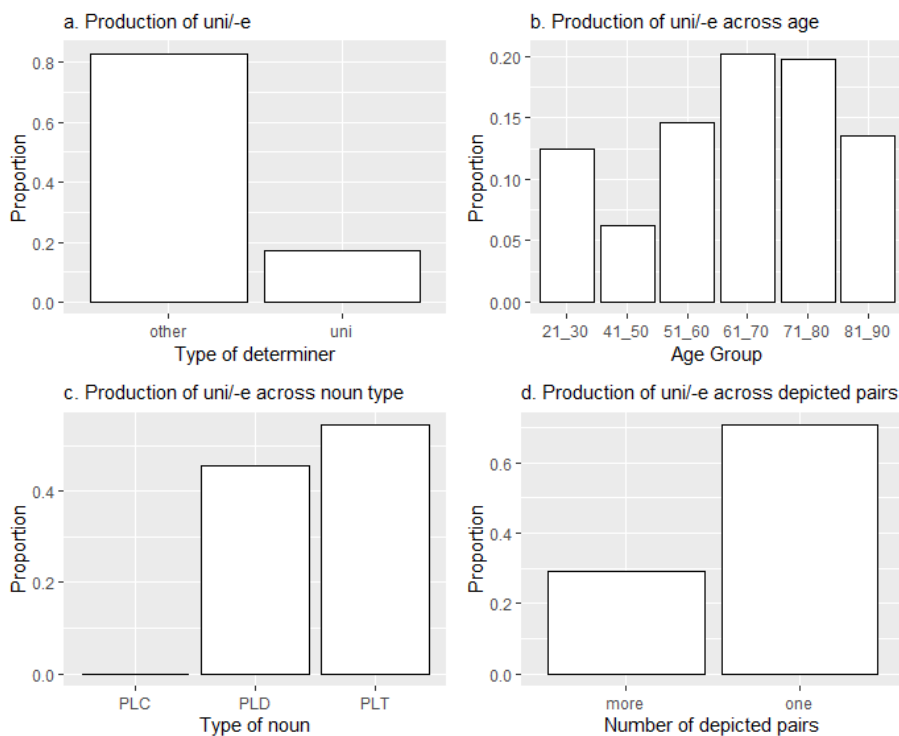


Figure 4. Production rate of the quantifier *uni/une* across variables.

In the random forest model, the variable importance scores revealed that the type of noun (0.017) is the most important predictor when analysing the emergence of *uni/une* in the context of pictures. Another pivotal predictor seems to be the number of depicted pairs (0.011); some predictivity can be spotted also for age (0.007) whereas sex does not seem to contribute statistically significant effects. The index of concordance for the model with this set of predictors is equal to $C = 0.84$. The impact of variables is plotted in Figure 5.

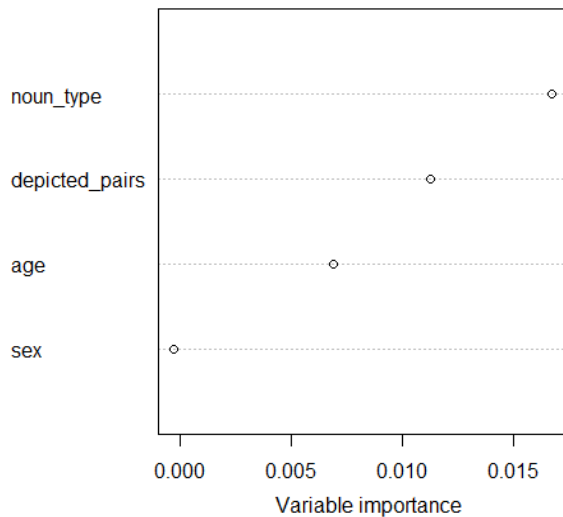


Figure 5. Conditional permutation importance of variables in the production of *uni/une*.

Subsequently, we grew a conditional inference tree ($C = 0.78$) to check how the predictors evaluated by the random forest interact with each other. All predictors used in the random forest model were included. The tree and its possible splits are plotted in Figure 6. The first split (Node 1) separates plural count nouns from plural dominant and *pluralia tantum* nouns. The left branch is not further split and Node 2 contains 240 observations (i.e. all the plural count target nouns used in the study) with no probability for *uni/une* to be elicited. The next split is located in the right branch and divides contexts in which more pairs of objects are depicted (Node 4) from those in which only one pair is depicted (Node 5). This latter split shows that the quantifier *uni/une* is less likely to be produced when referring to more pairs of objects. No further splits involving noun type (i.e. PLD vs. PLT) or age are observed.

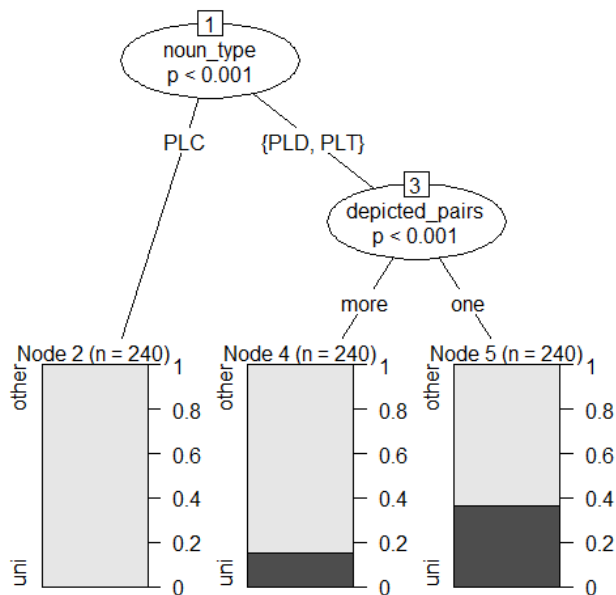


Figure 6. Conditional inference tree of the production of *uni/une* in the context of pictures. The variables selected for the best split and the corresponding p -values are circled; the branches specify the levels of the variables; the bar plots at the bottom illustrate the proportion of *uni/une* (in dark gray) vs. other determiners (in light gray) in each end node that contains all observations for that combination of features.

Lastly, a mixed-effect binomial regression model which contained subjects and experimental items as random effects was fitted to the data in a step-wise step-up procedure. As complete separation occurred

(i.e. the level “PLC” of the predictor “type of noun” can perfectly predict the outcome of no *uni/une* elicited), we performed our analysis on a subset of the data focusing on observations that involve *pluralia tantum* and plural dominant nouns. The final minimal adequate model performed significantly better than an intercept-only base line model (χ^2 (1): 12.565, $p < 0.001$), but has a suboptimal fit ($C = 0.78$). Noun type (χ^2 (1): 0.804, $p = 0.37$), age (χ^2 (5): 7.256, $p = 0.2$) and their respective interactions with the number of depicted pairs (χ^2 (2): 4.701, $p = 0.095$; χ^2 (10): 9.98, $p = 0.442$) do not contribute to fit significantly. The final minimal adequate model shows that the quantifier *uni/une* is more likely to be produced in the context of pictures representing one pair of objects than in the context of pictures representing more pairs of the same objects while no difference involving age and *pluralia tantum* or plural dominant nouns is observed. The model’s results are summarized in Table 2 and visualized in Figure 7.

Table 2. Summary of the final minimal adequate model which was fitted to predictors of the production of the quantifier *uni/une*.

Random effects	GROUPS NAME	VARIANCE	STD. DEV.	
	item	0.69484	0.8336	
	subject	0.06747	0.2597	
Fixed effects	ESTIMATE	STD. ERROR	Z VALUE	PR(> z)
(Intercept)	-1.6989	0.3424	-4.961	7e-07 ***
Depicted pairs_one	1.0248	0.2955	3.468	0.000525 ***

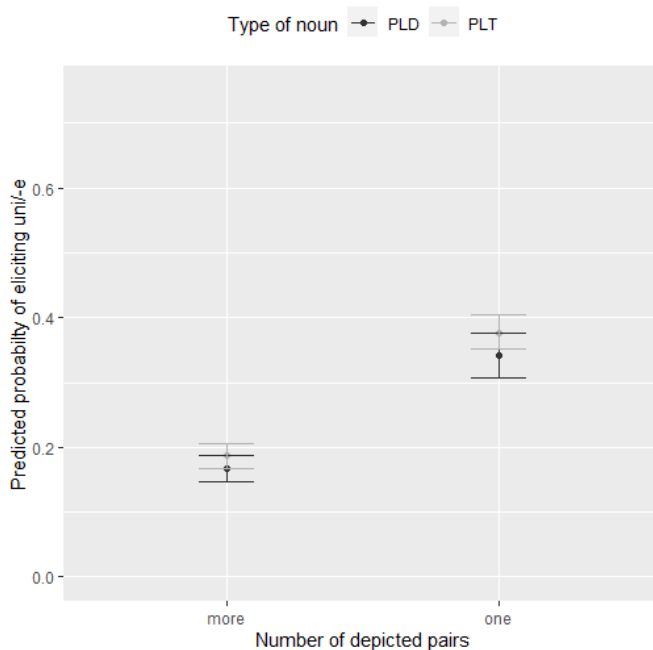


Figure 7. Probability of producing the quantifier *uni/une* in the context of pictures representing one vs. more pairs of objects

3.2. Rating

The quantifier *uni/une* was rated lower overall than the other two types of determiner (Figure 8a). Indeed, the proportions of scores equal to ‘5’ (perfectly acceptable) were near ceiling for both phrases containing the definite plural article ‘the’ and the classifier ‘pair(s) of’ (respectively: 95% and 90%), but approximately 45% in the case of phrases comprising the quantifier *uni/une*. Younger participants tended to assign higher scores to the quantifier *uni/une* (Figure 8b). Participants aged 20 to 30 judged the phrases with the quantifier *uni/une* as perfectly acceptable 71% of the time whereas participants aged 81 to 90 did so 25% of the time only (percentages for the other age groups, 41–50: 56%; 51–60: 12%; 61–70: 47%; 71–80: 46%).

The proportions of scores equal to '5' is higher in response to *pluralia tantum* (50%) and plural dominant nouns (48%) than in response to plural count nouns (26%; Figure 8c) and in the context of pictures representing one pair of objects (49%) than in the context of pictures representing more pairs (33%; Figure 8d).

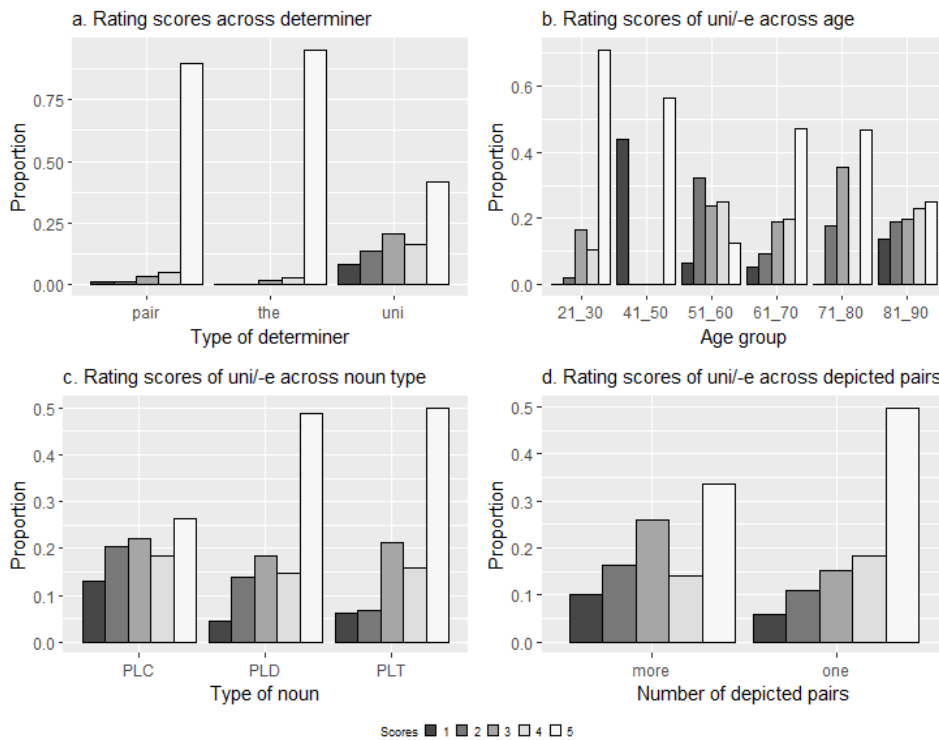


Figure 8. Rating scores of the quantifier *uni/une* across variables.

In the random forest model, the variable importance scores show that the type of determiner (0.097) is by far the most important predictor followed by age (0.043), noun type (0.023), and the number of depicted pairs (0.012). Conversely, sex does not seem to contribute statistically significant effects when analysing participants' performance related to the rating. Here the correct predictions are made for 81.8% of the total 2,160 observations. The impact of variables is plotted in Figure 9.

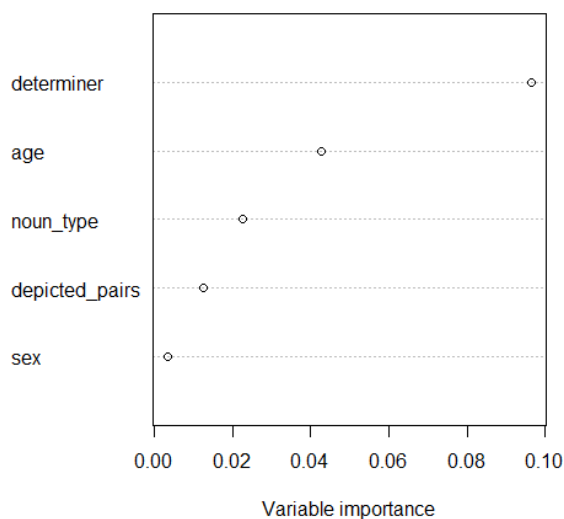


Figure 9. Conditional permutation importance of variables in the rating.

Based on the random forest model, we grew a conditional inference tree using the same predictors. In this case, the accuracy of the model's predictions is for 76.3% of the total 2,160 observations. The tree and its possible splits are plotted in Figure 10. The first split (Node 1) concerns the type of determiner and separates the quantifier *uni/une*, which is likely to be rated lower, from the definite plural article 'the' and the classifier 'pair(s) of'. A subsequent split divides the classifier 'pair(s) of' and the definite plural article 'the', the latter being more likely to be rated high.¹³ Moving to the right of the tree, Node 9 separates count plural nouns from *pluralia tantum* and plural dominant nouns showing that the quantifier *uni/une* is more likely to be accepted in response to these latter types of noun. In turn, it is more probable that phrases including *uni/une* followed by a *pluralia tantum* or a plural dominant noun are judged positively in the context of pictures representing one pair of objects rather than in the context of pictures representing more pairs (Node 10). Nevertheless, in the latter case, younger participants are more likely to assign higher scores than older speakers.

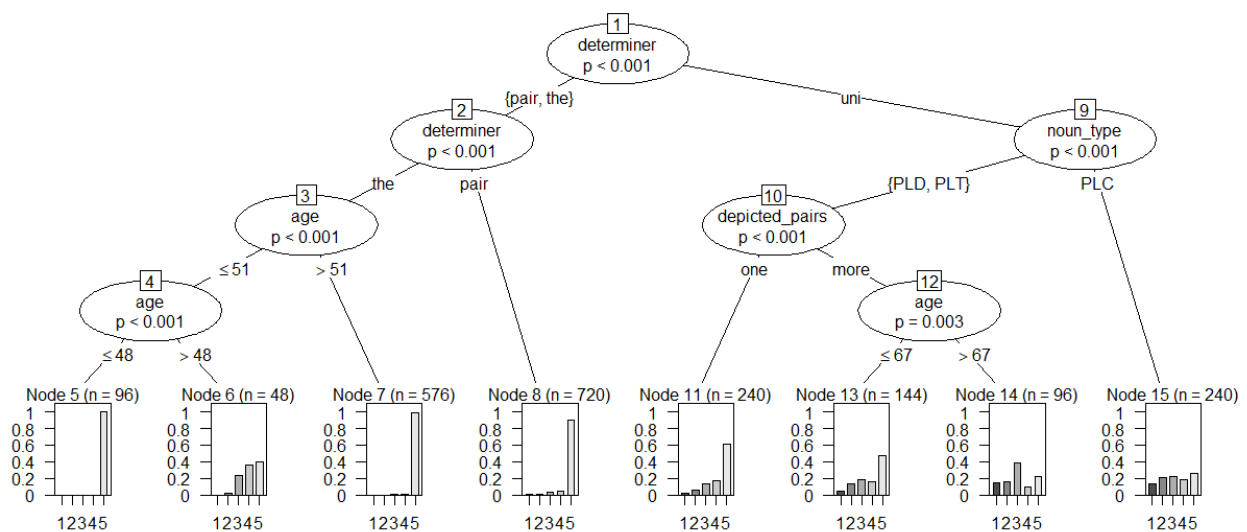


Figure 10. Conditional inference tree of the rating. The variables selected for the best split and the corresponding p-values are circled; the branches specified the levels of the variables. The bar plots at the bottom illustrate the proportion of scores for each point of the Likert scale in each end node that contains all observations for that combination of features.

As the last step, a cumulative link mixed model which contained subjects and experimental items as random effects was fit to the data in a step-wise step-up procedure. The final minimal adequate model, which includes the rating scores as the dependent variable and the type of determiner, the type of noun, and the number of depicted pairs as predictors, performed significantly better than an intercept-only base line model (χ^2 (17): 131.55, $p < 0.0001$), but has a suboptimal fit. Age (χ^2 (1): 1.32, $p = 0.25$) and its interaction with the type of determiner (χ^2 (3): 2.63, $p = 0.45$) do not contribute to fit significantly. The final minimal adequate model shows a main effect of the type of determiner, the definite plural article 'the' being more likely to be rated higher and the quantifier *uni/une* more likely to be rated lower. In addition, the model revealed an interaction between the three predictors: it is more probable that the quantifier *uni/une* is accepted when it modifies a *pluralia tantum* or a plural dominant noun in the context of pictures representing one pair of objects. The model's results are summarized in Table 3 and visualized in Figure 11.

¹³ Except in the case of participants aged 49 to 51. We have no hypothesis to explain the splits exemplified in Node 3 and in Node 4. Given the limited number of subjects, the effect of an outlier cannot be excluded. Certainly, further research is necessary to clarify this point. We do not return on this issue further in this paper.

Table 3. Summary of the final minimal adequate model which was fitted to predictors (type of determiner, type of noun, and number of depicted pairs) of the rating.

Random effects	GROUPS NAME	VARIANCE	STD. DEV.	CORR.
	Item (Intercept)	1.1424	1.069	
	Determiner_the	1.9789	1.407	-1.000
	Determiner_uni	0.6741	0.821	-1.000 1.000
	Subject (Intercept)	1.8557	1.362	
	Determiner_the	3.5654	1.888	0.288
	Determiner_uni	2.9572	1.720	-0.503 0.521
Coefficients	ESTIMATE	STD. ERROR	Z VALUE	PR(> Z)
Determiner_the	3.6019	1.2525	2.876	0.00403 **
Determiner_uni	-4.0856	0.6709	-6.090	1.13e-09 ***
Determiner_uni : Depicted pairs_one :	2.0239	0.7380	2.743	0.00610 **
Noun type_PLD				
Determiner_uni : Depicted pairs_one :	1.8511	0.8227	2.250	0.02445 *
Noun type_PLT				

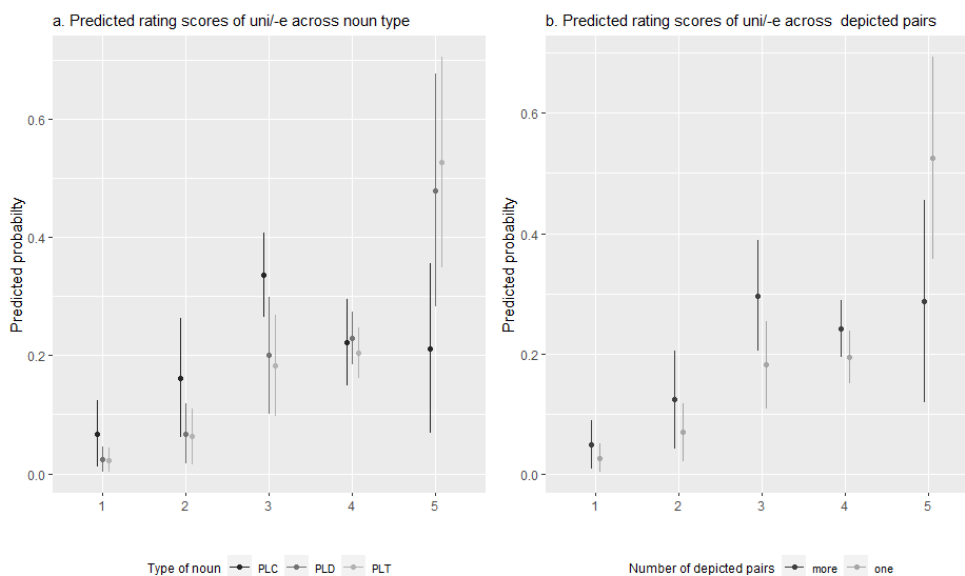


Figure 11. Rating scores probability of the quantifier *uni/une* across conditions. The five points of the Likert scale are reported on the x-axis.

4. Discussion

In this experimental pilot study, one of the major results that is consistent across tasks and across different statistics concerns the more restricted use of the quantifier *uni/une* than of other types of determiners. In fact, in the elicitation task, *uni/une* was produced infrequently compared to other determiners and, most notably, only when preceded by a *plurale tantum* or a plural dominant noun. This is to say that no informant spontaneously produced it when the target was a plural count noun. Moreover, the context of pictures representing one pair of objects is particularly suitable for eliciting this quantifier whereas the probabilities of *uni/une* being produced decrease when more than one pair of objects are pictured. This applies also for the acceptability judgements. Indeed, this quantifier is likely to be rated higher when it modifies a *plurale tantum* or a plural dominant noun in the context of pictures representing one pair of objects and to be rated lower when it appears in phrases involving plural count nouns.

Taken together, these findings seem to suggest that *uni/une* in the dialect of Sissano has not completed its way towards grammaticalization and resembles more a quantifier than an indefinite plural article (unlike other Romance languages, cf. Spanish *unos/unas*). Rather, its use is more similar to that of the corresponding Croatian *jedan*, since a collective interpretation – intended as ‘one pair/group of’ and often associated with *pluralia tantum* (Ojeda 1997) – provides a suitable and more likely context for the production and acceptability of this form in the plural. In this regard, it is undeniable that the corresponding Croatian plural form is mostly attested with *pluralia tantum*. This could have been a driving force behind the pattern borrowing, especially in light of the conspicuous prevalence of *pluralia tantum* nouns in Circum-Baltic languages (Vraciu 1976; Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wächli 2001). Indeed, it can be argued that nouns always heard and read in the plural in the source language (i.e. Croatian¹⁴) are more likely to be modified by the form *jedni/jedne/jedna* as well. Since dominant forms (for example, nouns occurring more frequently in the plural than in the singular; cf. §2.2.) have been noted to play a crucial role in language contact (Tiersma 1982; Hakimov 2016), it can be further argued that the corresponding Istriot *uni/une* has been borrowed mainly relying on the morpho-syntactic pattern “quantifier + noun always occurring in the plural”. In turn, such a pattern may have been extended also to those nouns occurring more frequently in the plural in the recipient language (i.e. the dialect of Sissano). Indeed, a paradigm skewed towards the plural value represents the lowest common denominator of *pluralia tantum* and plural dominant nouns used in this study. In other words, defective morphological number paradigms may have played a pivotal role in this case of pattern borrowing.

Notably, although plural dominant nouns are not linked to specific semantic features (Acquaviva 2008; Corbett 2019), it is nevertheless worth noticing that a sizeable subset of them does denote referents usually occurring in pairs and thus favouring a meaning of singularity in the sense of ‘one group of’, ‘one pair of’ when they are modified by *uni/une*. At the margin, it can be further noted that the semantic features at issue here are far from being negligible from a cognitive point of view. In fact, the abilities to recognize and discriminate numerosity and quantities rely on a tool-kit of non-verbal cognitive skills, i.e. the core knowledge systems that allow humans and animals to represent the most salient aspects of the environment, and to behave accordingly (Cantlon & Brannon 2007; Dehaene 2011; Rugani et al. 2015; Spelke 2000; Starr, Libertus, & Brannon 2013). These skills seem to have played a crucial role in evolutionary success: they seem to be present soon after birth in humans and to have a phylogenetically ancient origin, as they are mostly shared with non-human animal species (Carey 2009; Spelke 2000). Recently, it has been highlighted that the role of human languages as advanced communicative systems allow speakers to share information coming from mental experiences, and from the core knowledge systems in particular (for a review cf. Corballis 2017), and a growing body of literature has shown how this type of information can contribute to shaping languages from the distribution of the lexicon up to morphology and syntax (Franzon, Zanini & Rugani 2019; Franzon, Zanini & Rugani 2020; Malouf, Ackerman & Seyfarth 2015; Rinaldi & Marelli 2019; Strickland 2017). Certainly, many different factors are at play in language change and borrowing. Yet, it seems reasonable that these could be driven also by cognitive pressures that would account, first and foremost, also for the typologically widespread grammaticalized use of the numeral one (cf. §1.2).

Compared to Croatian *jedan*, though, the use of Istriot *uni/une* seems to be more restricted, as our tasks failed to detect high production rates and high acceptability scores in the context of pictures representing more than one pair. This result can be interpreted as an overall preference of *uni/une* with the meaning ‘a couple of’ over ‘some/certain’, pointing to the quantifier status of this plural form. Yet, an intriguing aspect emerges from our findings on the matter and relates to the sociolinguistic variable of age. The impact of this latter on the production of the form *uni/une* is limited, if there is any at all. Younger as well as older informants seem comfortable using it in the contexts described above. The acceptability judgment task, however, reveals a different picture. The forest model showed that age is quite an important variable in

¹⁴ In this paper and the following we mention Croatian as the source language of this pattern borrowing, but the Čakavian examples given in § 1.2.1 certainly contributed to its establishment.

predicting the rating scores. Considering the raw data, a trend can be spotted, as younger participants are more likely to assign higher scores to phrases involving *uni/une* than older participants do. The tree model revealed that this is largely attributable to the higher scores assigned by younger participants to phrases involving *uni/une* followed by a *plurale tantum* or a plural dominant noun than to phrases involving *uni/une* followed by a plural count noun regardless of the number of the depicted pairs. Conversely, older participants preferred the quantifier *uni/une* in the context of pictures representing just one pair of objects. This difference was not detected in the cumulative link mixed model probably because this type of model, unlike the trees method, requires a considerable number of subjects to give robust results (Baayen 2008; cf. §2.4.) whereas, in this study, the number of informants per age group was rather small. On the one hand, this represents a limitation and further informants need to be interviewed to confirm the output of the tree and forest models. On the other hand, the trees method is particularly suitable even when the sample size is small while the number of predictors is high (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012; cf. §2.4.) and therefore the results obtained in the forest and tree models are reliable at least as far as the informants involved in this study are concerned.

Moreover, evidence that older informants use the form *uni/une* in their every-day speech but, at the same time, that they are more prone to judge it as unacceptable comes from the conversations recorded before the structured part of the interviews. In particular, one of the two speakers that has been excluded from the analysis categorically denied the use of *uni/une* and claimed that “Only a Slav could say something like this”. Yet, data collected from the speaker’s spontaneous speech revealed that the form *uni/une* is actually used (*In cieza jera une bele coltrine* ‘There was a beautiful pair of curtains in the church’). Overall, these findings suggest that younger informants perceive a shorter distance between Sissanese and Croatian than older informants do, possibly because younger generations are more prone to be influenced by Croatian given the increasing prestige of this latter language and widespread bilingualism. By extension, this would also imply that younger informants’ use of the form *uni/une* is more likely to resemble that of Croatian *jedan* and, thus, to show a more advanced stage towards a complete grammaticalization. Based on that, we can posit that (i) the borrowing of the form *uni/une* was initially triggered by a gap in the paradigm of the indefinite articles in Sissanese; in this process, *pluralia tantum* acted as a shuttle in that these occur frequently in the source language and require plural agreement retaining, at once, a meaning of singular in the sense of ‘one pair of’, ‘one group of’; (ii) the use of the form *uni/une* among the younger generation is still mostly attested in the context of *pluralia tantum* (and plural dominant nouns), but its connection with the notion of singular is less straightforward given that *uni/une* is accepted in the context of pictures representing more than one pair as well. This may represent an intermediate step on the way to complete grammaticalization; (iii) in this latter case, *uni/une*, bearing the meaning ‘some / certain’, would modify plural count nouns in general.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the plural form *uni/une* deriving from the numeral ‘one’ in the Istriot dialect of Sissano. The use of the quantifier *uni/une* is not attested in dictionaries and grammars of Istriot varieties because it is still undergoing a process of grammaticalization and is prevalently produced in speech. One of the more significant findings of this study is that *uni/une* is mostly used as a quantifier in association with *pluralia tantum* and plural dominant nouns rather than with plural count nouns. The second major finding is that such a quantifier has achieved a more advanced stage of grammaticalization in the younger generation of speakers than in the older ones. This is not surprising since the younger generation is more influenced by Croatian and is usually bilingual, leading to cases of code-mixing and code-switching (for Istrian speakers, cf. Matticchio 2014).

According to contemporary typological studies, morphological borrowing is very frequent and is more attested in languages under high intensity of linguistic contact. This is indeed the case with Istriot and with another variety mentioned in the introduction, i.e. Istro-Romanian. Even in this dialect, the plural form derived from the numeral one, *uri/ure*, is mainly attested in the context of *pluralia tantum* (e.g. *ur-e ocol-e*,

one-F.PL eyeglasses (F).PL, ‘a pair of eyeglasses’). Loporcaro, Gardani & Giudici (2021) showed that in this case too, as in our investigation, the rise of the plural form can be explained more easily as a borrowing from the Slavic varieties rather than an inheritance of Latin. This case of a minority linguistic community close to Sissano corroborates our idea of the *status nascendi* of the quantifier *uni/une* due to language contact with Croatian. This study has contributed to exploring the plural form deriving from the numeral ‘one’ in Istriot and the insights gained may be relevant to comprehending the puzzle about its grammaticalization. Obviously, other studies on this topic are needed and further research could shed a new light on these indefinite plural forms. We are also planning new surveys encompassing other Istriot and Istrovenetan varieties to measure the distribution and diffusion of *uni/une* in this area.

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